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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT

Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them

Report of the Secretary-General

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 50/70 H of 12 December 1995, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its fifty-first session on the issue of assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them, and encouraged him to continue his efforts in the context of the recommendations of the United Nations advisory missions that he had dispatched in 1994 and 1995 at the request of the Government of Mali (see A/50/405). The present report is submitted pursuant to that request.

II. FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

2. There is a growing recognition that illicit traffic in small arms - a phenomenon that has afflicted many countries, like those in the Saharo-Sahelian region - constitutes a threat to populations and to national and regional security. Over the past several years, the issue of assistance to States in collecting small arms has been dealt with in various contexts, and the complexity of the subject has become increasingly apparent. Besides the efforts made in the peace-building context, as in the case of Mali, there has been a growing appreciation of the importance of a practical disarmament component in peacekeeping operations and in conflict prevention as well.

3. The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters, at its meeting in June 1996, expressed its support for peace-building efforts, such as those in West Africa, based on a proportional and integrated security and development approach, that is, tackling security-related issues, building civil institutions and developing

the economic sector. This approach will be explored at a high-level consultation on 21 October 1996 at Headquarters, organized by the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations Development Programme, which will bring together African States and key donors to consider the theme "post-conflict peace-building in West Africa: political and development initiatives". 1/

4. In connection with peacekeeping, the relationship between demobilization and disarmament on the one hand and conflict resolution on the other has been the subject of study by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR). Within the framework of its disarmament and conflict resolution project, it has examined a number of related issues and carried out several case studies of peace operations in which disarmament tasks were important parts of the wider mission. In the next stage, UNIDIR will go beyond the peacekeeping context to address the role of demobilization and disarmament in conflict prevention strategies, focusing on West Africa. 2/

5. In a further development related to this broad subject area, the General Assembly, in its resolution 50/70 B of 12 December 1995, mandated a panel of experts to report to it, at its fifty-second session, on various aspects of small arms and light weapons.

6. At its 1996 session, the Disarmament Commission successfully completed its item on arms transfers, with an emphasis on illicit traffic. The guidelines it adopted stress the need for adequate national systems of regulations and administrative procedures to exercise effective control over armaments, including their export and import; urge cooperation at the bilateral and multilateral level; and recognize that the United Nations has an important role to play in the eradication of illicit arms trafficking in accordance with its overall purposes and principles. 3/

7. It is important that Member States make known their positions on these matters. The General Assembly has requested their views in connection with the expert study on small arms, mentioned above, and the Secretary-General has submitted to the Assembly, at the present and fiftieth sessions, reports conveying views on measures to curb the illicit transfer and use of conventional arms (A/50/465 and A/51/181). Moreover, in its resolution 50/70 H, the Assembly invited Member States to implement national control measures in order to check the illicit circulation of small arms.

8. The Secretary-General will keep under review the issue of assistance to States in curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them, and will report on further developments.

Notes

1/ See report of the Secretary-General on the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (A/51/352).

2/ See note by the Secretary-General on UNIDIR (A/51/364, annex I).

3/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 42 (A/51/42), annex I.